

## Call & Respond by botanicapoetica

**Series:** [Call & Respond \[2\]](#)

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Hurt/Comfort, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, M/M, Other, billy needs a hug

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2017-11-30

**Updated:** 2017-11-30

**Packaged:** 2022-04-03 05:06:42

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 1,980

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

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### Author's Note:

- For [singing\\_to\\_shipwreck](#).

This one is a bit softer than I usually approach, but was inspired by a convo on discord that I couldn't let go

Billy couldn't remember the last time he'd spent this much time in his car, maybe not since California. Not since the few days before they'd left, when Billy could remember waking up for 4 days straight with a crick in his neck and a persistent tremor running through him. Neil had thrown his bags into the yard and Billy had played it off like he was going to stay with a friend before they officially left. Not that him and Neil didn't know the truth, it was more for Susan and Max, but Billy would never admit it. He'd lived in that house in California for months trying to shield Max from what she was about to live with, hoping to god it at least would never reach her. He hadn't counted on being the one to turn his father's ingrained rage onto her, but it was too late to change anything now.

Too fucking late for anything at all to change now, Billy thought. Things were the same as they'd been since he was ten years old and found out his mother was dead. He'd run then too, hidden under a boardwalk until the stars came out. When he'd come back home that night, Neil had grabbed his shirt and hit him for the first time. Not the last. Today was no different than any time before, there was no such thing as different. Billy stretched his arm out from his spot in the backseat, fishing around until his fingers closed on the pack of cigarettes he'd been looking for.

Sitting up, he rolled his bedding back up and shoved it under the backseat before stepping out of the car. He looked down at his watch and realized there was still another hour and a half until school started. He'd parked here the last two nights, under the guise of practicing for basketball early in the morning, if anyone saw him, but mostly so he'd have somewhere to go immediately after waking up. Being alone with his thoughts was a no go, so much of a threat that

he didn't touch them beyond his own self-imposed warning.

The sound of a car pulling up to the parking lot brought him back to himself and he couldn't help but laugh at the sight of Steve Harrington's beemer parking a few spots away, watching him get out with a bag over his shoulder and his gym clothes on. Of course this motherfucker would be wholesome enough to actually come to school early to practice.

Billy's fists clenched at just the thought of it. Instead he occupied his hands with a cigarette and a lighter, his jaw tightening more than usual when he took a drag, watching Steve come up to him. Over the last several months he and Harrington had become, while not friends, somewhere along the lines of friendly. Billy still gave him shit, but it had even less heat than before and had almost become just another knee-jerk reaction to seeing him. Billy found that this time, however, he couldn't fucking hack it. He couldn't squeeze out another fucking quip, he barely felt like standing up at all. Neil had broken his stereo over his back before he'd run off and he was fucking tired, bone tired and beyond this bullshit. He didn't even let Harrington get more than half a word out, shoulder checking him as he stormed onto the track field. Thankful to have had the foresight to sleep in his work out clothes, he wasted no time breaking into a run, but his blood boiled when he heard Harrington coming up behind him.

"Hargrove, what the fuck, hold up..." he heard Steve pant, and felt a hand pawing for his shoulder even as he flinched his body away violently. His shoulder blades were a fucking wreck right now, and he wasn't about to let that particular information slip with a misjudged grip.

"Not in the fucking mood, Steve. Get away from me." Billy ground out, giving Steve a warning shove off of the tracks and continuing to run. Noticing the sound of someone's feet behind him had stopped, he yanked all the energy he had and kept running. He lost himself in the sound of his feet smacking the ground, his own breathing gasping out of him for real and explainable reasons, and the air rushing past him. He didn't know how long he'd been running until he heard more cars pulling up to the parking lot, teachers most likely, and made himself stop. Unfortunately, his body seemed to catch up with him and he dropped to his knees, promptly throwing up and narrowly missing

himself. Coughing harshly, he felt a pair of eyes on him and looked up to see Steve standing a good distance away, his eyebrows furrowed and a hand on his hip. What a fucking mother hen, had he been watching him this whole fucking time? Billy chose to ignore this line of thought and hefted himself up, swallowing unpleasantly and willing his body to carry him to the spare school clothes he kept in his locker.

The day passed much the same as the last few had. Hunger gnawed at him, his body ached, and he felt an absolutely screaming urge to either cry or upend something. Instead he did neither, floating through classes and begging off gym, telling Tommy and the other dipshits some story about being too hungover from the night before to get them off his back. Through all of it, Steve Harrington's eyes followed him sharply, which caused his hackles to raise. He expected Steve to press him, but found himself blissfully alone the rest of the day, only receiving another long look as Steve piled the kids into his car. The hours passing into nightfall were happily spent on the hood of his car in front of some shit diner, drinking out of a paper bag and half hoping to get caught so he could sleep somewhere warmer.

Unfortunately his daydreaming about being arrested didn't come true, and he found himself back in the far corner of the Hawkins High School parking lot, digging his bedding out and laying it across the backseat. Looking down at it, sorry sight that it was, and thinking of the ever present Just In Case bag in his trunk, he watched his hands begin to shake. He sat heavily down in the backseat, lighting a cigarette with one hand and letting his other dig his necklace out. His fingers closed around the saint in a death grip and he forced his eyes shut. Dymphna, patron saint of runaways and the mentally ill. His mother had been both, and she'd passed that on to him along with the necklace, but he could never find it in himself to blame her. He would've gotten out too, any way he could, if he were her. Billy Hargrove was not a praying man, but sometimes he hoped his mother could see him, except he didn't know where you really ended up if you died like that. He just had to hold out for another few months, but he didn't know if he could. Hoped that he could, just until he could really leave without completely fucking his future up, but maybe he'd just...

He let go of the necklace like he'd been burnt, stepping out of the car to finish his cigarette, letting the cold air shock him out of his head. Maybe tomorrow he'd go home, he could check with Max and get a feel for where Neil was at. After a particularly bad fight things usually eased up for a bit, though they were no less tense or hostile. As he climbed back in and laid down, he tried to inspire some kind of false confidence. Tonight though, he could do this again tonight. It would be fine, he'd done it before, he'd probably do it again. Staring at the ceiling, he waited for exhaustion to pull him down.

Neil was standing over him, his hand around his throat. He was speaking to him in that low, slow voice, slamming Billy's head into the ground to punctuate himself. "C'mon, tough guy. Get. Back. Up." But Billy couldn't. One minute they'd been arguing about his outfit, his fucking outfit, and Billy just had to say some shit about his mother wanting him to keep her jacket. He'd tensed up when Neil had come at him, and Neil had taken it as a slight. Billy had put his hands out to stop his father but had tripped and fallen, something heavy cracking across his back as he tried to crawl away mindlessly.

"You did this. To yourself, you little. Shit. Look at me, Billy. BILLY."

Billy was violently ripped out of his dream, a large and painful gasp tearing through him at the sound of his name. His hands flew out before his eyes even opened, closing on a shoulder with the other swiping out to hit. His eyes finally opened to see Steve fucking Harrington looming over him, hands around his wrists to stop him from pummeling him. "Billy, hey, hey it's me. Don't hit me again, man, it's just me." Steve said as quickly as possible, obviously trying not to get whacked again. Billy's mind finally wrapped around the situation and his eyes flicked to his wrist. He'd slept an hour past his usual time the last few days, and he felt the blood in his face drain as he realized he'd been caught. Looking at Steve, he knew for sure, those big eyes regarding him like he was an injured and angry animal.

He found himself without words again, feeling his body betray him as his jaw rattled and his eyes stayed wide and wild. He watched Steve's every move, watching him sit more comfortably in the backseat, his hands not leaving Billy's wrists. "Leave it, Harrington. I need you to leave it. Don't tell me you're sorry, don't call me a pussy, don't

fucking do anything. I'm too fucking tired." Billy said, wincing at how shaky his voice sounded in his ears. A long beat of silence rang through the car until Steve finally decided to talk, the caution in his eyes giving way to something more concrete, releasing Billy's hands to put out one of his own.

"Give me your keys."

"What the fuck? Why?"

"Just give me your fucking keys, Hargrove." Steve pushed, but he didn't seem angry, he seemed set on something. Like when he'd be lecturing those stupid little brats in the parking lot. Slightly diffused by the lack of hostility, Billy warily dropped his keys into Steve's hand, watching him climb into the driver's seat with absolute fucking confusion. "Lay back down, we're not gonna go to school today. Don't give me any shit either. I'm gonna drive, and you're gonna sleep because you look half dead and judging by the way you woke up, you weren't getting anything close to actual sleep. I'd kind of like my kind of friend back, and if I have to drive around Hawkins all day with you drooling in the back then I guess that's how we'll do it. So lay back down."

Billy knew he could've argued, could've kicked Harrington's ass right out of his front seat without batting an eyelash.

But.

Having some small reprieve, even just for a day, was too tempting. Plus, he had kind of put a kink in Steve's ongoing plans to make him a tolerable person to humanity, so maybe he owed him. He let his head fall back and his eyes drift closed and felt a hand squeeze his ankle before leaving it. There was something else in there too, something digging under his skin and making him feel warm, but he wouldn't touch it. Someday, maybe, but not today.

### **Author's Note:**

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